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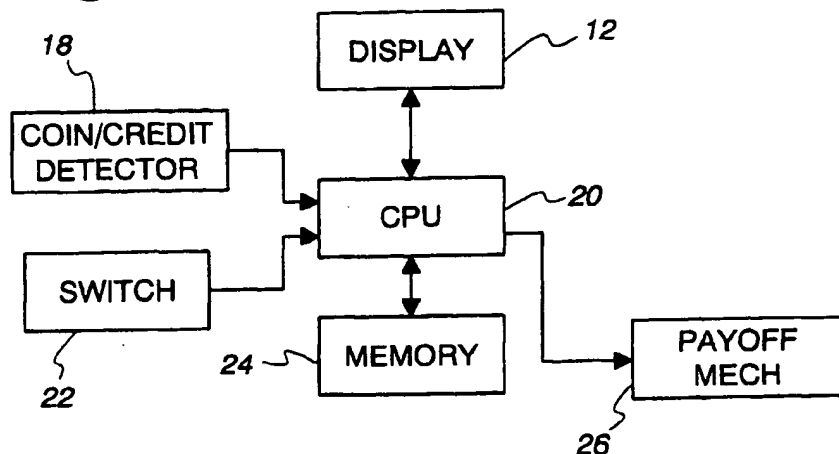
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(54) **Gaming machine with multiple payoff modes and award presentation schemes**

(57) A slot machine with multiple payoff modes and award presentations. The payoff modes in one embodiment are associated with a basic game and include a first and second payoff mode, the second payoff mode defining a "SUPER SCATTER" feature. Game outcomes are selected in the first and second payoff mode and symbol groups associated with the game outcomes are evaluated in the first payoff mode for symbol combinations displayed relative to one or more paylines and in the second payoff mode for symbol combinations displayed in scatter-pay format. In one embodiment, the machine operates in the first payoff mode until the oc-

currence of a symbol combination triggering the second payoff mode, then operates in the second payoff mode for a single spin before returning to the first payoff mode. The award presentations include a non-linear sequence of award values which in one embodiment are associated with a bonus game characterized by characters bidding upon a selected object that may be presented in irregular time intervals. The sequence of award values (bids) including a first value ("opening bid"), a number of intermediate values (bids) and a final value (a "winning" bid). A payoff is awarded based on the final winning bid.

Fig. 2



Description**FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

- 5 [0001] The present invention relates generally to gaming machines and, more particularly, to gaming machines with multiple payoff modes and award presentation schemes.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

- 10 [0002] Gaming machines, such as slot machines, video poker machines and the like, have been a cornerstone of the gaming industry for several years. Generally, the popularity of such machines with players is dependent on the likelihood (or perceived likelihood) of winning money at the machine and the intrinsic entertainment value of the machine relative to other available gaming options. Where the available gaming options include a number of competing machines and the expectation of winning each machine is roughly the same (or believed to be the same), players are most likely
15 to be attracted to the most entertaining and exciting of the machines. Shrewd operators consequently strive to employ the most entertaining and exciting machines available, because such machines attract frequent play and hence increase profitability to the operator.

- [0003] One concept which has been successfully employed to enhance the entertainment value of a game is the concept of a "secondary" or "bonus" game which may be played in conjunction with a "basic" game. The bonus game
20 may comprise any type of game, either similar to or completely different from the basic game, which is entered upon the occurrence of a selected event or outcome of the basic game. Generally, bonus games provide a greater expectation of winning than the basic game and may also be accompanied with more attractive or unusual video displays and/or audio. Because the bonus game concept offers tremendous advantages in player appeal and excitement relative to other known games, and because such games are attractive to both players and operators, there is a continuing need
25 to develop gaming machines with new types of bonus games to satisfy the demands of players and operators. The present invention is directed to satisfying this need.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

- 30 [0004] In accordance with one aspect of the present invention, there is provided a slot machine operable in a first and second payoff mode. The slot machine includes a processor operable to select game outcomes in the first and second payoff mode and a display for displaying symbol groups associated with the game outcomes. Each of the symbol groups consist of a plurality of symbols displayed at a plurality of display positions. The slot machine includes symbol evaluation means for evaluating the symbol groups displayed in the first and second payoff modes. The symbol
35 groups displayed in one of the first and second payoff modes are evaluated for symbol combinations displayed relative to one or more paylines and the symbol groups displayed in the other of the first and second payoff modes are evaluated for symbol combinations displayed in scatter-pay format. In one embodiment, the processor operates in the first payoff mode until the occurrence of a symbol combination triggering the second payoff mode, then operates in the second payoff mode for a fixed number of spins before returning to the first payoff mode.

- 40 [0005] In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of operating a gaming machine under control of a processor to execute a bonus game program defining an award presentation. The method comprises selecting, under processor control, a sequence of award values for the award presentation, the sequence of award values including an opening award value, a number of intermediate award values and a final award value. The sequence of award values are presented to a player, and a payoff is awarded based on the final award value.

- 45 [0006] In accordance with yet another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of operating a gaming machine generally as described above, wherein the award presentation has an auction theme in which bids are made upon a selected object. The opening award value defines an opening bid, the intermediate award values define intermediate bids and the final award value defines a winning bid. In one embodiment, the game program defines a plurality of game characters for presenting the bids. The characters which present the bids are selectable under
50 either player or processor control.

- [0007] In accordance with yet another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a gaming machine having a presentation element and a processor. The processor causes the presentation element to successively present a non-linear increasing sequence of potential payouts to a player. The presentation element presents the sequence of potential payouts at irregular time intervals. A final payout is awarded to the player from one of the potential payouts.
55 The sequence of potential payouts may be bids made upon a selected object presented by the presentation element. In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method for operating a gaming machine under the control of a processor. The method comprises providing a presentation element and successively presenting on the presentation element a non-linear increasing sequence of potential payouts to a player. The sequence of po-

tential payouts are presented by the presentation element at irregular time intervals. The method also includes awarding the player at least a final one of the potential payouts.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0008] The foregoing and other advantages of the invention will become apparent upon reading the following detailed description and upon reference to the drawings in which:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a video gaming machine operable to implement a bonus game with auction theme according to one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a block diagram of the video gaming machine of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is an illustration of a five-reel, nine-line basic game which is played on the video gaming machine of FIG. 1 according to one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 4 shows an outcome of the basic game of FIG. 3 which will trigger a SUPER SCATTER bonus feature according to one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 5 shows an example outcome of the SUPER SCATTER bonus feature;

FIG. 6 shows an example display screen which might appear in an item selection mode of a bonus game with auction theme according to one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 7 shows an inventory of various items which might be selected in an item selection mode from a display screen of the type shown in FIG. 6; and

FIG. 8 shows an example display screen which might appear in an auction mode of a bonus game with auction theme according to one embodiment of the present invention.

[0009] While the invention is susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms, specific embodiments have been shown by way of example in the drawings and will be described in detail herein. However, it should be understood that the invention is not intended to be limited to the particular forms disclosed. Rather, the invention is to cover all modifications, equivalents, and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

DESCRIPTION OF SPECIFIC EMBODIMENTS

[0010] Turning now to the drawings and referring initially to FIG. 1, there is depicted a video gaming machine 10 which may be used to implement a basic game and bonus game according to the present invention. The gaming machine 10 includes a video display 12 which in one embodiment comprises a touch-screen CRT display. Alternatively, the video display 12 may comprise a dot matrix, LED, LCD, electroluminescent display or generally any type of video display known in the art. In the illustrated embodiment, the video gaming machine 10 comprises a "slant-top" version, in which the video display 12 is slanted at about a thirty-degree angle toward the player. It will be appreciated, however, that any of several other models of gaming machines are within the scope of the present invention including, for example, "upright" versions in which the video display 12 is oriented vertically relative to the player, or gaming machines which include mechanical, rather than video displays.

[0011] In one embodiment, the gaming machine 10 is operable to play a game entitled WINNING BID™ which features a basic game in the form of a slot machine with five simulated spinning reels (see FIG. 3) and a bonus game having an art auction theme. It will be appreciated, however, that the gaming machine 10 may be implemented with games other than the WINNING BID™ game and/or with any of several alternative game themes.

[0012] FIG. 2 is a block diagram of a control system suitable for operating the gaming machine 10. Coin/credit detector 18 signals a CPU 20 when a player has inserted a number of coins or played a number of credits. Then, the CPU 20 operates to execute a basic game program which causes the video display 12 to display the basic game which includes simulated reels with symbols displayed thereon (see FIG. 3). The basic game commences in response to the player activating a switch 22 (e.g., by pulling a lever or pushing a button), causing the CPU 20 to set the reels in motion, randomly select a game outcome and then stop the reels to display symbols corresponding to the pre-selected game outcome. In one embodiment, certain ones of the basic game outcomes cause the CPU 20 to enter a SUPER SCATTER spinning reel pay feature and certain other outcomes cause the CPU 20 to enter a bonus mode causing the video display 12 to show a bonus game. The WINNING BID™ SUPER SCATTER feature and bonus game will be described in detail in relation to FIGs. 4-8.

[0013] A system memory 24 stores control software, operational instructions and data associated with the gaming machine 10. In one embodiment, the memory 24 comprises a separate read-only memory (ROM) and battery-backed random-access memory (RAM). However, it will be appreciated that the system memory 24 may be implemented on any of several alternative types of memory structures or may be implemented on a single memory structure. A payoff

mechanism 26 is operable in response to instructions from the CPU 20 to award a payoff of coins or credits to the player in response to certain winning outcomes which might occur in the basic game or bonus game. The payoff amounts corresponding to certain combinations of symbols in the basic game is predetermined according to a pay table stored in system memory 24. The payoff amounts corresponding to certain outcomes of the bonus game are also stored in system memory 24.

[0014] As shown in FIG. 3, the WINNING BID™ basic game is implemented on the video display 12 on five video simulated spinning reels 30, 32, 34, 36 and 38 (hereinafter "reels") with nine paylines 40-48. Generally, game play is initiated by inserting a number of coins or playing a number of credits, causing the CPU 20 (FIG. 2) to activate a number of paylines corresponding to the number of coins or credits played. In one embodiment, the player selects the number of paylines (between one and nine) to play by pressing the "Select Lines" key 56 on the video display 12. The player then chooses the number of coins or credits to bet on the selected paylines by pressing the "Bet Per Line" key 58.

[0015] After activation of the paylines, the reels 30, 32, 34, 36 and 38 may be set in motion by touching the "Spin Reels" key 60 or, if the player wishes to bet the maximum amount per line, by using the "Max Bet Spin" key 62 on the video display 12. Alternatively, other mechanisms such as, for example, a lever or push button may be used to set the reels in motion. The CPU 20 uses a random number generator (not shown) to select a game outcome (e.g., "basic" game outcome) corresponding to a particular set of reel "stop positions." The CPU 20 then causes each of the video reels 30, 32, 34, 36 and 38 to stop at the appropriate stop position. Video symbols are displayed on the reels 30, 32, 34, 36 and 38 to graphically illustrate the reel stop position and indicate whether the stop position of the reels represents a winning game outcome.

[0016] Table 1 indicates the various video symbols on reels 30 through 38 in one embodiment of the WINNING BID™ basic game. The various symbols used in one embodiment of the WINNING BID™ basic game include: "AUCTION," "VIKING," "ACTRESS," "LAMP," "GUARD," "PEARLS," "STEER," "URN," "GAVEL" and "SUPER SCATTER."

TABLE 1 --

WINNING BID™ REEL SYMBOLS				
Reel 30	Reel 32	Reel 34	Reel 35	Reel 38
Auctioneer	Auctioneer	Auctioneer	Auctioneer	Auctioneer
Gavel	Gavel	Gavel	Viking	Viking
Viking	Viking	Pearls	Lamp	Lamp
Actress	Actress	Actress	Actress	Actress
Lamp	Pearls	Super	Super	Super
Viking	Viking	Viking	Viking	Viking
Guard	Guard	Guard	Guard	Guard
Lamp	Lamp	Super	Super	Super
Pearls	Pearls	Pearls	Pearls	Pearls
Steer	Steer	Steer	Steer	Steer
Gavel	Gavel	Gavel	Lamp	Lamp
Viking	Viking	Viking	Viking	Viking
Steer	Steer	Steer	Steer	Steer
Lamp	Pearls	Lamp	Pearls	Pearls
Viking	Lamp	Pearls	Lamp	Lamp
Guard	Guard	Guard	Guard	Guard
Gavel	Gavel	Gavel	Viking	Viking
Lamp	Viking	Lamp	Pearls	Urn
Auctioneer	Auctioneer	Auctioneer	Auctioneer	Auctioneer
Viking	Lamp	Super	Super	Super
Pearls	Urn	Urn	Urn	Urn

TABLE 1 -- (continued)

WINNING BID™ REEL SYMBOLS				
Reel 30	Reel 32	Reel 34	Reel 35	Reel 38
Actress	Actress	Actress	Actress	Actress
Gavel	Gavel	Gavel	Viking	Pearls
Lamp	Urn	Urn	Urn	Urn
Guard	Lamp	Guard	Lamp	Viking
Pearls	Viking	Lamp	Super	Pearls
Urn	Urn	Urn	Pearls	Lamp
Steer	Steer	Steer	Steer	Steer
Gavel	Gavel	Super	Lamp	Super
Urn	Urn	Urn	Super	Lamp
Steer	Lamp	Auctioneer	Auctioneer	Viking
Pearls	Pearls	Super	Lamp	Super
Urn	Urn	Lamp	Urn	Urn
Actress	Actress	Actress	Actress	Actress
Pearls	Pearls	Super	Pearls	Lamp
Urn	Urn	Viking	Urn	Urn
Actress	Lamp	Actress	Actress	Actress
Pearls	Pearls	Lamp	Pearls	Lamp
Urn	Urn	Urn	Urn	Urn
Steer	Lamp	Viking	Steer	Steer
Viking	Viking	Pearls	Pearls	Lamp
Pearls	Pearls	Lamp	Lamp	Pearls
Urn	Urn	Urn	Urn	Urn
Lamp	Viking	Pearls	Pearls	Lamp
X	Pearls	Viking	Viking	Pearls
X	X	Urn	Urn	Urn
X	X	Pearls	Pearls	Viking
X	X	Viking	Viking	Pearls
X	X	Urn	Urn	Urn
X	X	Pearls	X	Viking
X	X	Viking	X	Pearls
X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X

[0017] In the embodiment of FIG. 3, three symbols are displayed at three respective display positions (i.e., "upper, "center" and "lower") on each reel 30, 32, 34, 36, 38 thus defining a symbol group of fifteen symbols for each game

outcome. Specifically, in the illustrated embodiment, reel 30 includes an "URN" symbol in the upper display position, a "PEARLS" symbol in the center display position and a "PAINTING" symbol in the lower display position; reel 32 includes an "STEER" symbol in the upper display position, an "ACTRESS" symbol in the center display position and an "URN" symbol in the lower display position; reel 34 includes a "GUARD" symbol in the upper display position, a "PAINTING" symbol in the center display position and a "PEARLS" symbol in the lower display position; reel 36 includes a "GUARD" symbol in the upper display position, a "VIKING HELMET" (hereinafter "VIKING") symbol in the center display position and a "PEARLS" symbol in the lower display position; reel 38 includes an "URN" symbol in the upper display position, a "PEARLS" symbol in the center display position and a "VIKING" symbol in the lower display position.

[0018] In the embodiment of FIG. 3, each of the paylines 40-48 extend through one symbol on each of the five reels 30, 32, 34, 36 and 38. Payline 40 starts at the upper left symbol (e.g., "URN") on reel 30, extends through the center symbol (e.g., "ACTRESS") on reel 32, the lower symbol (e.g., "PEARLS") on reel 34, the center symbol (e.g., "VIKING") on reel 36 and terminates at the top symbol (e.g., "URN") on reel 38. Payline 41 starts at the upper left symbol (e.g., "URN") on reel 30, extends through the upper symbol (e.g., "STEER") on reel 32, the center symbol (e.g., "PAINTING") on reel 34, the lower symbol (e.g., "PEARLS") on reel 36 and terminates at the lower symbol (e.g., "VIKING") on reel 38. Payline 42 extends through the top symbol on each reel (e.g., "URN" on reel 30, "STEER" on reel 32, "GUARD" on reel 34, "GUARD" on reel 36 and "URN" on reel 38.) Payline 43 starts at the center symbol (e.g., "PEARLS") on reel 30, extends through the lower symbol (e.g., "URN") on reel 32, the center symbol (e.g., "PAINTING") on reel 34, the top symbol (e.g., "GUARD") on reel 36 and terminates at the center symbol (e.g., "PEARLS") on reel 38. Payline 44 extends through the center symbol on each reel (e.g., "PEARLS" on reel 30, "ACTRESS" on reel 32, "PAINTING" on reel 34, "VIKING" on reel 36 and "PEARLS" on reel 38.) Payline 45 starts at the center symbol (e.g., "PEARLS") on reel 30, extends through the upper symbol (e.g., "STEER") on reel 32, the center symbol (e.g., "PAINTING") on reel 34, the lower symbol (e.g., "PEARLS") on reel 36 and terminates at the center symbol (e.g., "PEARLS") on reel 38. Payline 46 extends through the lower symbol on each reel (e.g., "PAINTING" on reel 30, "URN" on reel 32, "PEARLS" on reel 34, "PEARLS" on reel 36 and "VIKING" on reel 38.) Payline 47 starts at the lower symbol (e.g., "PAINTING") on reel 30, extends through the lower symbol (e.g., "URN") on reel 32, the center symbol (e.g., "PAINTING") on reel 34, the upper symbol (e.g., "GUARD") on reel 36 and terminates at the upper symbol (e.g., "URN") on reel 38. Payline 48 starts at the lower symbol (e.g., "PAINTING") on reel 30, extends through the center symbol (e.g., "ACTRESS") on reel 32, the upper symbol (e.g., "GUARD") on reel 34, the center symbol (e.g., "VIKING") on reel 36 and terminates at the lower symbol (e.g., "VIKING") on reel 38.

[0019] In one embodiment, the symbol groups defining the "basic" game outcomes are evaluated by the processor for winning combinations in either of two payoff modes. In a first payoff mode, winning outcomes are identified by certain predefined winning symbol combinations appearing in the symbol group relative to an active payline. In one embodiment, the basic game automatically begins in the first payoff mode and stays in the first payoff mode until the occurrence of a special symbol combination triggering the second payoff mode. In a second payoff mode, termed a "SUPER SCATTER" mode, winning outcomes are identified by the predefined winning symbol combinations appearing in the symbol group in "scatter-pay" format. In scatter-pay format, winning combinations occur when predefined winning symbol combinations are displayed, in any position, on any of the reels. Thus, symbols making up winning combinations in the SUPER SCATTER mode do not need to be aligned with an active payline or displayed on particular reels. In one embodiment, the basic game operates in the second payoff mode (i.e., SUPER SCATTER mode), once activated, for a fixed number of spins and then returns to the first payoff mode. The SUPER SCATTER mode will be described in detail in relation to FIGs. 4 and 5.

[0020] In one embodiment, the symbol groups defining the game outcomes are evaluated for the same predefined winning symbol combinations in both the first and second payoff modes. The winning combinations are preferably identified on a pay table which is affixed to the machine 10 and/or displayed by the video display 12 in response to a command by the player (e.g., by pressing the "Pay Table" button 54). The pay table enables the player to view the winning combinations and their associated payoff amounts. If the symbol group includes a winning combination, the game credits the player an amount corresponding to the award in the pay table for that combination multiplied by the amount of credits bet. The player may collect the amount of accumulated credits by pressing the "Collect" button 50.

Table 2 --

WINNING BID™ Basic Game (First Payoff Mode)					
WIN COMBINATIONS					Pay
Reel 30	Reel 32	Reel 34	Reel 36	Reel 38	
AUCTION	AUCTION	AUCTION	AUCTION	AUCTION	5000

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Table 2 -- (continued)

WINNING BID™ Basic Game (First Payoff Mode)					
WIN COMBINATIONS					Pay
Reel 30	Reel 32	Reel 34	Reel 36	Reel 38	
AUCTION	AUCTION	AUCTION	AUCTION		400
AUCTION	AUCTION	AUCTION			100
AUCTION	AUCTION				20
AUCTION					2
ACTRESS	ACTRESS	ACTRESS	ACTRESS	ACTRESS	1000
ACTRESS	ACTRESS	ACTRESS	ACTRESS		120
ACTRESS	ACTRESS	ACTRESS			35
GUARD	GUARD	GUARD	GUARD	GUARD	1000
GUARD	GUARD	GUARD	GUARD		100
GUARD	GUARD	GUARD			30
STEER	STEER	STEER	STEER	STEER	1000
STEER	STEER	STEER	STEER		80
STEER	STEER	STEER			25
Any Char	Any Char	Any Char	Any Char	Any Char	70
Any Char	Any Char	Any Char	Any Char		12
Any Char	Any Char	Any Char			5
URN	URN	URN	URN	URN	200
URN	URN	URN	URN		80
URN	URN	URN			15
PEARLS	PEARLS	PEARLS	PEARLS	PEARLS	150
PEARLS	PEARLS	PEARLS	PEARLS		60
PEARLS	PEARLS	PEARLS			12
VIKING	VIKING	VIKING	VIKING	VIKING	120
VIKING	VIKING	VIKING	VIKING		50
VIKING	VIKING	VIKING			10
LAMP	LAMP	LAMP	LAMP	LAMP	100
LAMP	LAMP	LAMP	LAMP		40
LAMP	LAMP	LAMP			7

Table 2 -- (continued)

WINNING BID™ Basic Game (First Payoff Mode)					
WIN COMBINATIONS					Pay
Reel 30	Reel 32	Reel 34	Reel 36	Reel 38	
GAVEL		GAVEL		GAVEL	0
SUPER		SUPER		SUPER	5

[0021] Table 2 is a pay table identifying various winning combinations of symbols in the WINNING BID™ basic game in the first payoff mode. The "WIN COMBINATIONS" portion identifies the various symbol combinations providing a payoff when they stop on the designated reels of an active payline in the first payoff mode. The specific type(s) and number(s) of symbol combinations define the various winning combinations. Generally, except for the "AUCTION" combination, winning combinations in the first payoff mode require that at least three of five corresponding symbols be displayed on the active payline on the designated reels. For example, the symbol combinations of five "ACTRESS" symbols (i.e. on reels 30 through 38), four "ACTRESS" symbols (i.e. on reels 30 through 36) and three "ACTRESS" symbols (i.e. on reels 30 through 34) stopping on the payline provide a payoff in the first payoff mode.

[0022] As shown in Table 2, the "AUCTION" symbol has five winning combinations in the first payoff mode of the WINNING BID™ basic game, including: five "AUCTION" symbols (i.e. on reels 30 through 38), four "AUCTION" symbols (i.e. on reels 30 through 36), three "AUCTION" symbols (i.e. on reels 30 through 34), two "AUCTION" symbols (i.e. on reels 30 through 32), and a single "AUCTION" symbol (i.e. on reel 30). Thus, the first payoff mode provides a payoff when any number of one to five "AUCTION" symbols are displayed on the designated reels of the active payline. The first payoff mode of the WINNING BID™ basic game also provides a payoff for mixed combinations of the "AUCTION", "ACTRESS", "GUARD" and "STEER" symbols displayed on the designated reels of the active payline as represented by "AnyChar" in Table 2. For example, the first payoff mode provides a payoff when the active payline displays the symbol combination of "ACTRESS", "GUARD" and "STEER" on reels 30 through 34.

[0023] In one embodiment, the "AUCTION" symbol acts as a wildcard for the "STEER", "ACTRESS" and "GUARD" symbols. Thus, for example, the combination of "STEER", "AUCTION" and "STEER" symbols on the active payline is equivalent to the combination of three "STEER" symbols appearing on the designated reels of the active payline.

[0024] The "PAY" column of Table 2 identifies the amount of coin(s) or credit(s) awarded as the payoff for the various winning combinations in the basic game, per unit wagered. Thus, for example, the "AUCTION", "AUCTION" combination in the first payoff mode will pay 20 coins or credits with one coin played; that same combination will pay 100 coins or credits with five coins played.

[0025] In one embodiment, three "SUPER SCATTER" symbols appearing on an active payline is a winning combination which will trigger a second payoff mode termed a "SUPER SCATTER" mode. An example is shown in FIG. 4 in which the three "SUPER SCATTER" symbols appear on respective reels 30, 34, and 38 along payline 40. As shown in Table 2, the combination of three "SUPER SCATTER" symbols itself has a "PAY" value of 0 credits award in the first payoff mode. Generally, however, a greater award may be expected in the second payoff mode (i.e., SUPER SCATTER mode) which is triggered by three "SUPER SCATTER" symbols. It will be appreciated, however, that alternative embodiments within the scope of the present invention might award a value for the combination of three "SUPER SCATTER" symbols in the first payoff mode. Once the SUPER SCATTER mode becomes active, the CPU 20 causes the reels to "respin" to display a new symbol group. In one embodiment, the CPU 20 operates in the SUPER SCATTER mode for a fixed number of spins (e.g., a single spin) and then returns to the first payoff mode.

[0026] FIG. 5 shows the display 12 as it may appear after respinning the reels in the SUPER SCATTER mode. In the SUPER SCATTER mode, the processor evaluates the symbol group for winning symbol combinations which are displayed in scatter-pay format, i.e., without regard to the display positions of the respective symbols. In one embodiment, the winning symbol combinations in SUPER SCATTER mode are generally the same combinations as in the first payoff mode, having the same payoff values. In the SUPER SCATTER mode, however, because the symbols are evaluated in scatter-pay format, more than one winning combination is likely to occur. Generally, the player receives the sum of the coin(s) or credit(s) for each winning combination which appears in the SUPER SCATTER mode, except only the highest-value combination is counted for any particular type of combination. For example, if four "PEARLS" symbols appear anywhere on the screen in the SUPER SCATTER mode, the player receives the same amount of coins or credits as would be awarded for four "PEARLS" symbols appearing on an active payline in the first payoff mode. However, the player would not be awarded for the two combinations of three "PEARL" symbols which are nec-

essarily included in the four symbols.

[0027] In particular with respect to FIG. 5, there are two winning symbol combinations appearing in the displayed symbol group: a combination of three "URN" symbols (paying 15 credits) and a combination of four "PEARL" symbols (paying 60 credits) for a total of 65 credits.

Table 3 --

WINNING BID™ Basic Game (SUPER SCATTER Mode)					
WIN COMBINATIONS					PAY
Reel 30	Reel 32	Reel 34	Reel 36	Reel 38	
AUCTION	AUCTION	AUCTION	AUCTION	AUCTION	5000
AUCTION	AUCTION	AUCTION	AUCTION		400
AUCTION	AUCTION	AUCTION		AUCTION	400
AUCTION	AUCTION		AUCTION	AUCTION	400
AUCTION		AUCTION	AUCTION	AUCTION	400
	AUCTION	AUCTION	AUCTION	AUCTION	400
AUCTION	AUCTION	AUCTION			100
AUCTION	AUCTION		AUCTION		100
AUCTION	AUCTION			AUCTION	100
AUCTION		AUCTION	AUCTION		100
AUCTION		AUCTION		AUCTION	100
AUCTION			AUCTION	AUCTION	100
	AUCTION	AUCTION	AUCTION		100
	AUCTION	AUCTION		AUCTION	100
	AUCTION		AUCTION	AUCTION	100
		AUCTION	AUCTION	AUCTION	100
AUCTION	AUCTION				20
AUCTION		AUCTION			20
AUCTION			AUCTION		20
AUCTION				AUCTION	20
	AUCTION	AUCTION			20
	AUCTION		AUCTION		20
	AUCTION			AUCTION	20
		AUCTION	AUCTION		20
		AUCTION		AUCTION	20
			AUCTION	AUCTION	20
AUCTION					2
	AUCTION				2
		AUCTION			2
			AUCTION		2
				AUCTION	2

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Table 3 -- (continued)

WINNING BID™ Basic Game (SUPER SCATTER Mode)					
WIN COMBINATIONS					PAY
Reel 30	Reel 32	Reel 34	Reel 36	Reel 38	
ACTRESS	ACTRESS	ACTRESS	ACTRESS	ACTRESS	1000
ACTRESS	ACTRESS	ACTRESS	ACTRESS		120
ACTRESS	ACTRESS	ACTRESS		ACTRESS	120
ACTRESS	ACTRESS		ACTRESS	ACTRESS	120
ACTRESS		ACTRESS	ACTRESS	ACTRESS	120
	ACTRESS	ACTRESS	ACTRESS	ACTRESS	120
ACTRESS	ACTRESS	ACTRESS			35
ACTRESS	ACTRESS		ACTRESS		35
ACTRESS	ACTRESS			ACTRESS	35
ACTRESS		ACTRESS		ACTRESS	35
ACTRESS		ACTRESS	ACTRESS		35
ACTRESS		ACTRESS		ACTRESS	35
	ACTRESS	ACTRESS	ACTRESS		35
	ACTRESS	ACTRESS		ACTRESS	35
	ACTRESS		ACTRESS	ACTRESS	35
		ACTRESS	ACTRESS	ACTRESS	35
GUARD	GUARD	GUARD	GUARD	GUARD	1000
GUARD	GUARD	GUARD	GUARD		100
GUARD	GUARD	GUARD		GUARD	100
GUARD	GUARD		GUARD	GUARD	100
GUARD		GUARD	GUARD	GUARD	100
	GUARD	GUARD	GUARD	GUARD	100
GUARD	GUARD	GUARD			30
GUARD	GUARD		GUARD		30
GUARD	GUARD			GUARD	30
GUARD		GUARD	GUARD		30
GUARD		GUARD		GUARD	30
GUARD			GUARD	GUARD	30
	GUARD	GUARD	GUARD		30
	GUARD	GUARD		GUARD	30
	GUARD		GUARD	GUARD	30
		GUARD	GUARD	GUARD	30
STEER	STEER	STEER	STEER	STEER	1000

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Table 3 -- (continued)

WINNING BID™ Basic Game (SUPER SCATTER Mode)					
WIN COMBINATIONS					PAY
Reel 30	Reel 32	Reel 34	Reel 36	Reel 38	
STEER	STEER	STEER	STEER		80
STEER	STEER	STEER		STEER	80
STEER	STEER		STEER	STEER	80
STEER		STEER	STEER	STEER	80
	STEER	STEER	STEER	STEER	80
STEER	STEER	STEER			25
STEER	STEER		STEER		25
STEER	STEER			STEER	25
STEER		STEER	STEER		25
STEER		STEER		STEER	25
STEER			STEER	STEER	25
	STEER	STEER	STEER		25
	STEER	STEER		STEER	25
	STEER		STEER	STEER	25
		STEER	STEER	STEER	25
Any Char	Any Char	Any Char	Any Char	Any Char	70
Any Char	Any Char	Any Char	Any Char		12
Any Char	Any Char	Any Char		Any Char	12
Any Char	Any Char		Any Char	Any Char	12
Any Char		Any Char	Any Char	Any Char	12
	Any Char	Any Char	Any Char	Any Char	12
Any Char	Any Char	Any Char			5
Any Char	Any Char		Any Char		5
Any Char	Any Char			Any Char	5
Any Char		Any Char	Any Char		5
Any Char		Any Char		Any Char	5
Any Char			Any Char	Any Char	5
	Any Char	Any Char	Any Char		5
	Any Char	Any Char		Any Char	5
	Any Char		Any Char	Any Char	5
		Any Char	Any Char	Any Char	5
URN	URN	URN	URN	URN	200
URN	URN	URN	URN		80

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Table 3 -- (continued)

5

10

15

20

25

30

35

40

45

50

55

WINNING BID™ Basic Game (SUPER SCATTER Mode)					
WIN COMBINATIONS					PAY
Reel 30	Reel 32	Reel 34	Reel 36	Reel 38	
URN	URN	URN		URN	80
URN	URN		URN	URN	80
URN		URN	URN	URN	80
	URN	URN	URN	URN	80
URN	URN	URN			15
URN	URN		URN		15
URN	URN			URN	15
URN		URN	URN		15
URN		URN		URN	15
URN			URN	URN	15
	URN		URN		15
	URN	URN		URN	15
	URN		URN	URN	15
		URN	URN	URN	15
PEARLS	PEARLS	PEARLS	PEARLS	PEARLS	150
PEARLS	PEARLS	PEARLS	PEARLS		60
PEARLS	PEARLS	PEARLS		PEARLS	60
PEARLS	PEARLS		PEARLS	PEARLS	60
PEARLS		PEARLS	PEARLS	PEARLS	60
	PEARLS	PEARLS	PEARLS	PEARLS	60
PEARLS	PEARLS	PEARLS			12
PEARLS	PEARLS		PEARLS		12
PEARLS	PEARLS			PEARLS	12
PEARLS		PEARLS	PEARLS		12
PEARLS		PEARLS		PEARLS	12
PEARLS			PEARLS	PEARLS	12
	PEARLS	PEARLS	PEARLS		12
	PEARLS	PEARLS		PEARLS	12
	PEARLS		PEARLS	PEARLS	12
		PEARLS	PEARLS	PEARLS	12
VIKING	VIKING	VIKING	VIKING	VIKING	120
VIKING	VIKING	VIKING	VIKING		50
VIKING	VIKING	VIKING		VIKING	50

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Table 3 -- (continued)

WINNING BID™ Basic Game (SUPER SCATTER Mode)					
WIN COMBINATIONS					PAY
Reel 30	Reel 32	Reel 34	Reel 36	Reel 38	
VIKING	VIKING		VIKING	VIKING	50
VIKING		VIKING	VIKING	VIKING	50
	VIKING	VIKING	VIKING	VIKING	50
VIKING	VIKING	VIKING			10
VIKING	VIKING		VIKING		10
VIKING	VIKING			VIKING	10
VIKING		VIKING	VIKING		10
VIKING		VIKING		VIKING	10
VIKING			VIKING	VIKING	10
	VIKING	VIKING	VIKING		10
	VIKING	VIKING		VIKING	10
	VIKING		VIKING	VIKING	10
		VIKING	VIKING	VIKING	10
LAMP	LAMP	LAMP	LAMP	LAMP	100
LAMP	LAMP	LAMP	LAMP		40
LAMP	LAMP	LAMP		LAMP	40
LAMP	LAMP		LAMP	LAMP	40
LAMP		LAMP	LAMP	LAMP	40
	LAMP	LAMP	LAMP	LAMP	40
LAMP	LAMP	LAMP			7
LAMP	LAMP		LAMP		7
LAMP	LAMP			LAMP	7
LAMP		LAMP	LAMP		7
LAMP		LAMP		LAMP	7
LAMP			LAMP	LAMP	7
	LAMP	LAMP	LAMP		7
	LAMP	LAMP		LAMP	7
	LAMP		LAMP	LAMP	7
		LAMP	LAMP	LAMP	7
SUPER		SUPER		SUPER	0

[0028] Table 3 is a pay table identifying various winning combinations of symbols in the WINNING BID™ basic game SUPER SCATTER payoff mode. The "WIN COMBINATIONS" portion identifies the various symbol combinations providing a payoff in the SUPER SCATTER mode. Generally, the symbol combinations identified in Table 3 for the SUPER

SCATTER mode are the same symbol combinations identified in Table 2 for the first payoff mode, except that winning combinations in the SUPER SCATTER mode occur in scatter-pay format and do not need to be displayed on a particular reel relative to an active payline. Thus, for any particular symbol combination type, there are generally a greater number of winning combinations in the SUPER SCATTER mode than there are in the first payoff mode.

[0029] For example, Table 3 indicates that there are thirty-one possible combinations of "AUCTION" symbols that define winning combinations in the SUPER SCATTER mode of the WINNING BID™ basic game (as compared to five winning combinations in the first payoff mode). The winning combinations in the SUPER SCATTER mode include: one combination of five "AUCTION" symbols, five combinations of four "AUCTION" symbols, ten combinations of three "AUCTION" symbols, ten combinations of two "AUCTION" symbols and five combinations of a single "AUCTION" symbol. The winning combinations of symbols other than "AUCTION" symbols are identified in similar fashion in Table 3.

[0030] The "PAY" column of Table 3 identifies the amount of coin(s) or credit(s) awarded for the various winning combinations in the basic game, per unit wagered. The payoff values identified for the various combinations in Table 3 are the same as the payoff values for those combinations in Table 3. Thus, for example, a combination of five "AUCTION" symbols displayed in scatter-pay format in the SUPER SCATTER mode will pay 5.000 coins or credits, the same amount that that combination would pay in the first payoff mode if displayed along an active payline.

[0031] In the embodiment of Table 3, three "SUPER SCATTER" symbols appearing in scatter-pay format in SUPER SCATTER mode will result in a payoff (e.g., 5 credits in a 1-coin game) but will not trigger an additional SUPER SCATTER spin. It will be appreciated, however, that alternative embodiments within the scope of the present invention might award different payoff amounts or no payoff, or might provide additional spins in response to "SUPER SCATTER" symbols appearing in scatter-pay format in the SUPER SCATTER mode.

[0032] The CPU 20 enters the bonus game when a special "start-bonus" outcome occurs on an active payline in the first payoff mode of the basic game. Specifically, in one embodiment of the WINNING BID™ game, three "GAVEL" symbols displayed, on an active payline, on the respective reels 30, 34 and 38 is a start-bonus outcome which will cause the CPU 20 to enter the bonus game.

[0033] In one embodiment, the combination of three "GAVEL" symbols has zero "PAY" value in the basic game, whether occurring in the first payoff mode or the SUPER SCATTER mode. Thus, that ever value may be derived from the combination of three "GAVEL" symbols occurs in the bonus game which is triggered by that combination. It will be appreciated, however, that alternative embodiments within the scope of the present invention may include start-bonus combinations which have pay value(s) in any combination of the basic game (first payoff mode), basic game (second payoff mode) and/or the bonus game, including values which might differ in the respective games.

[0034] Upon entering the bonus game, the CPU 20 operates to replace the display of reels 30, 32, 34, 36, and 38 on video display 12 with a bonus game screen depicting a first stage of the bonus game. FIG. 6 is an illustration of a bonus game screen depicting a first stage of the WINNING BID™ bonus game. The bonus game screen of FIG. 6 has a "yard sale" theme which provides for the player to choose a selected item which is to be featured in a later award presentation stage of the bonus game, this latter stage having an "auction" theme in one embodiment which will be described in relation to FIG. 8. It will be appreciated that other embodiments within the scope of the present invention might allow for the player to select a desired item in other than a "yard sale," might provide for an award presentation in other than an "auction" theme, or might provide for the CPU 20, rather than the player, to select the featured item.

[0035] FIG. 7 shows an inventory of the some of the items which might be selected for auction in one embodiment of the WINNING BID™ bonus game. The items include: a stone wheel 70, a mounted unicorn head 71, an urn 72, a tiara 73, a large thimble 74, a "Scream" type painting 75, snakeskin boots 76, Sherlock Holmes pipe/hat 77, a photograph of an alien 78, an old phonograph 79, a pearl necklace 80, a "mona lisa" painting 81, a collection of magazines 82, a viking helmet 83, a mounted fish 84, a dinosaur bone 85, a coonskin cap 86, a wheel of cheese 87, a bust of Medusa 88 and a rare bottle of wine 89. It will be appreciated, however, that the inventory may comprise any of several alternative items depending on the game program.

[0036] In one embodiment, the CPU 20 randomly selects a predetermined number of items from the inventory to be displayed in the item selection screen of FIG. 6. The item selection screen is preferably a touch-screen display and the player selects an item by touching the screen over the desired item. It will be appreciated, however, that screens other than touch-screen displays may be used and a variety of other alternative means may be used to select the item including, for example, joysticks, trackballs, mouse-type structures, push-buttons or keys. After selection of the desired item, the CPU 20 operates to replace the item selection screen with an award presentation screen which in one embodiment has an "auction" theme.

[0037] FIG. 8 is an illustration of an award presentation screen having an auction theme. In the embodiment of FIG. 8, the award presentation screen represents an auction house displaying the selected item (not shown) on table 90 and also showing various characters including an auctioneer 92 and various other characters 93 through 99 for bidding on the item. Specifically, the characters in FIG. 8 include: auctioneer 92, sophisticated woman movie star 93, yuppie rich guy "Biff Diamond" 94, sleeping security guard 95, old guy in a wheelchair (with nurse) 96, snobby rich couple 97, oil tycoon (with steer) 98 and a British rock star 99. Of course, it will be appreciated that any of several different

characters might be shown on the award presentation screen depending on the game program.

[0038] With an auction award presentation screen such as the type shown in FIG. 8, the CPU 20 provides an award presentation characterized by the various characters "bidding" on the selected object. The auction progresses with selected characters making escalating bids on the selected object until the occurrence of a final "winning" bid. Generally, each of the bids represent award values which might be awarded in the bonus game and the player is awarded the award value associated with the final "winning" bid (multiplied by the amount bet). The award presentation thereby provides a mixture of excitement and apprehension to the player watching the progression of bids and hoping for a high "winning" bid which will result in a high payout. Briefly, the auction award presentation provides great player anticipation with an increasing non-linear sequence of potential awards.

TABLE 4 --

WINNING BID™ AUCTION SUMMARY		
AUCTION SUMMARY		
Outcomes	Weight	Bonus Prob
10	0	0
20	0	0
30	0	0
40	0	0
50	30	0.04011
60	30	0.04011
70	30	0.04011
80	40	0.05348
90	40	0.05348
100	40	0.05348
110	30	0.04011
120	30	0.04011
130	30	0.04011
140	30	0.04011
150	30	0.04011
160	30	0.04011
170	30	0.04011
180	30	0.04011
190	30	0.04011
200	30	0.04011
220	30	0.04011
240	30	0.04011
260	30	0.04011
280	20	0.02674
300	20	0.02674
320	12	0.01604
340	12	0.01604
360	12	0.01604
380	12	0.01604

TABLE 4 -- (continued)

WINNING BID™ AUCTION SUMMARY		
AUCTION SUMMARY		
Outcomes	Weight	Bonus Prob
400	12	0.01604
420	8	0.01070
440	8	0.01070
460	8	0.01070
480	4	0.00535
500	4	0.00535
550	4	0.00535
600	2	0.00267
650	2	0.00267
700	2	0.00267
750	1	0.00134
800	1	0.00134
850	1	0.00134
900	1	0.00134
950	1	0.00134
1000	1	0.00134

[0039] Table 4 is a summary table identifying various outcomes ("bids") which may be made in one embodiment of the WINNING BID™ game. In one embodiment, the CPU 20 randomly selects a final bid from among the possible "outcomes" identified in the first column of Table 4 before any of the bids are presented to the player. The table is weighted so that certain outcomes ("bids") are generally more likely to be selected than certain other outcomes ("bids") as identified in the second column entitled "weight". For example, the outcome "100" (having a weight of 40) is more likely to be selected for the final bid than the outcome "110" (having a weight of 30). Table 4 also lists the probability of the outcome once in the bonus game.

[0040] In one embodiment, the player starts the auction by touching one of the displayed characters, ultimately causing that character to make an opening bid. In one embodiment, the value of the opening bid is determined by the CPU 20 randomly selecting an opening bid from 30 to 100. On the award presentation screen (FIG. 8), the auctioneer starts the bidding at the opening bid and then the selected character accepts the bid by either speaking or making a gesture. Thereafter, the auction progresses with the auctioneer and/or characters raising the bidding until one of the characters makes the final "winning" bid.

[0041] After the opening bid in the auction, the CPU 20 selects the character to make the subsequent bid. Each of the characters have an internal desire factor for particular auction items that make them more prevalent to bid. Specifically, each character has an assigned desire factor between one and ten using logical affiliations. For example, the rancher has a high desire factor for the cowboy boots but the actress has a low desire. Touching the character for the opening bid increases their desire factor for the currently auctioned item by five desire points. For each bid after the opening bid, the desire factor of each character is multiplied by a different random number generated by the CPU 20. The character with the highest product of this multiplication makes the bid on the auction item. For example, suppose the actress has the desire factor of four and the random multiplier of nine, and the rock star has the desire factor of seven and the random multiplier of three. The actress bids because four times nine is greater than seven times three. This method allows some characters to have strong desires for particular auction items but randomness still exists in the bidding process.

[0042] In one embodiment, the amount(s) of the raises in bidding are determined by the CPU 20 according to an increment table which in one embodiment varies from 10 to 50, but not to exceed the final bid. For example, suppose the CPU 20 selects an opening bid of "60" and a final bid of "110." Further assume that the increment table dictates consecutive non-linear increments of 10, 10, 20, 20, 30, etc. The CPU 20 might determine "70" to be the first interme-

diated bid (i.e., the sum of "60" and the first increment "10"), then determine "80" to be the next bid (i.e., the sum of "70" and the second increment "10"), then determine "100" to be the next bid (i.e., the sum of "80" and the third increment "20"), then determine "120" to be the next bid (i.e., the sum of "100" and the fourth increment "20") but, because "120" exceeds the final bid of "110," the CPU 20 will cause bids of "60," "80," "100" and "120" to be presented, in sequence, in the award presentation.

[0043] To increase player excitement in one embodiment, the CPU 20 randomly executes a non-linear jump bid about every fourth bid. During the jump bid, one of the characters shouts out a value which is higher than the ask bid given by the auctioneer 92. Jump bids may only occur for a small subset of the outcomes, namely the outcomes of 70, 100, 150, 200, 250, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700, 800, 900 and 1000. The CPU 20 will only execute jump bid to the next jump bid value if the jump bid does not exceed the selected final outcome. For example, if the present bid is 120, the CPU 20 executes a jump bid to 150.

[0044] In one embodiment, there will occasionally be an irregular time interval between bids, namely a lull in the bidding causing the auctioneer to say "Going Once, Going Twice ..." after an intermediate bid before a character accepts the bid, thereby giving the false appearance that the bidding is about to end. However, the bidding does not end until the auctioneer says "Sold," with the most recent bid defining the "winning bid" which is to be awarded to the player. This "Going Once, Going Twice ..." time tease randomly occurs about every sixth bid. On half of the large outcomes, the character "Biff Diamond" enters the room during the action and overbids.

[0045] During the auction presentation, the characters randomly stop bidding. The "Biff Diamond" character adds further excitement to the auction. On half of the large outcome, "Biff Diamond" enters the room during the bidding and overbids to force large outcomes. For entertainment value, the auction presentation includes some fanciful features. When a character is outbid for a second time during the auction, their face has a surprise look. When a character is outbid for a fourth time, their face has an angry expression.

[0046] The auction presentation ends when the auctioneer says "Going Once, Going Twice, Sold." The CPU 20 then awards the player the amount of the final bid multiplied by the line bet and returns to the basic game.

[0047] It will be appreciated that the present invention has generally been described with reference to a particular embodiment of the WINNING BID™ game, but the present invention is not limited to the particular embodiments described herein. For example, while the aforementioned game has a basic game in the form of a slot machine, the present invention may be implemented with virtually any type of game of chance or skill or combination of such games having outcomes (e.g., "start-bonus" outcomes) which may trigger play of a bonus game. The basic game may comprise, for example, a video poker or video blackjack game. Other variations within the scope of the present invention include bonus games with different themes, different displays and/or different types of award presentations, basic games with different numbers and types of reels and/or symbols, different payoff modes and/or payline configurations, and basic or bonus games with different values of coin awards, different probabilities, expected values, etc.

[0048] While the present invention has been described with reference to one or more particular embodiments, those skilled in the art will recognize that many changes may be made thereto without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention. Each of these embodiments and obvious variations thereof is contemplated as falling within the spirit and scope of the claimed invention, which is set forth in the following claims.

Claims

1. A slot machine comprising:

a processor operable to select game outcomes in a first and second payoff mode;
a display for displaying symbol groups associated with the game outcomes, each of the symbol groups comprising a plurality of symbols displayed at a plurality of display positions; and
symbol evaluation means for evaluating the symbol groups displayed in the first and second payoff modes, the symbol groups displayed in one of the first and second payoff modes being evaluated for symbol combinations displayed relative to one or more paylines and the symbol groups displayed in the other of the first and second payoff modes being evaluated for symbol combinations displayed in scatter-pay format.

2. The slot machine of claim 1 wherein the processor operates in the first payoff mode until the occurrence of a symbol combination triggering the second payoff mode.

3. The slot machine of claim 2 wherein in the first payoff mode, the symbol evaluation means evaluates the symbol groups for symbol combinations displayed relative to said paylines, the symbol evaluation means comparing the symbol combinations displayed relative to the paylines to a plurality of predefined winning combinations and determining the symbol group to include a winning combination if one of said symbol combinations corresponds to

one of the predefined winning combinations.

4. The slot machine of claim 3 wherein in response to a symbol combination triggering the second payoff mode, the processor operates in the second payoff mode for a fixed number of spins and then returns to the first payoff mode.
5. The slot machine of claim 4 wherein in response to a symbol combination triggering the second payoff mode, the processor operates in the second payoff mode for a single spin and then returns to the first payoff mode.
6. The slot machine of claim 4 wherein in the second payoff mode, the symbol evaluation means evaluates the symbol groups for symbol combinations displayed in scatter-pay format, the symbol evaluation means comparing the symbol combinations displayed in scatter-pay format to the plurality of predefined winning combinations and determining the symbol group to include a winning combination if at least one of said symbol combinations corresponds to one of the predefined winning combinations.
7. The slot machine of claim 1 further comprising valuation means responsive to the symbol evaluation means for determining payoff amounts associated with the game outcomes.
8. The slot machine of claim 7 wherein in the first payoff mode, the valuation means awards an amount of credits associated with a single highest-value winning combination displayed relative to one of the paylines.
9. The slot machine of claim 7 wherein in the second payoff mode, the valuation means awards an amount of credits defined by summing values associated with a plurality of winning combinations displayed in scatter-pay format.
10. A method of operating a slot machine under control of a processor operable in a first and second payoff mode, the method comprising:
 - selecting, under processor control, one or more game outcomes in the first payoff mode from a predefined set of possible outcomes, at least one of the possible outcomes defining a transition outcome;
 - switching operation from the first payoff mode to the second payoff mode in response to the selection of a transition outcome in the first payoff mode;
 - selecting, under processor control, one or more game outcomes in the second payoff mode from the set of possible outcomes used in the first payoff mode;
 - displaying symbol groups associated with the game outcomes selected in the first and second payoff modes, each of the symbol groups comprising a plurality of symbols displayed at a corresponding plurality of display positions; and
 - awarding credits based on the symbol groups displayed in the first and second payoff modes, the credits in the first payoff mode being based on symbols in the symbol group which are displayed relative to an active payline, the credits in the second payoff mode being based on all of the symbols in the symbol group.
11. A method of operating a gaming machine under control of a processor, the method comprising the steps of:
 - executing, under processor control, a bonus game program defining an award presentation;
 - selecting, under processor control, a sequence of award values for said award presentation, the sequence of award values including an opening award value, a number of intermediate award values and a final award value;
 - presenting the sequence of award values to a player; and
 - awarding a payoff to the player based on the final award value.
12. The method of claim 11 wherein the sequence of award values comprises an escalating sequence.
13. The method of claim 12 wherein the step of selecting award values includes the step of selecting, under processor control, the final award value from a plurality of possible final award values.
14. The method of claim 12 wherein the step of selecting award values includes the step of selecting, under processor control, the opening award value from a plurality of possible opening award values.
15. The method of claim 12 wherein the step of selecting award values includes the steps of selecting an award increment and determining, under processor control, an intermediate award value by adding the selected award

increment to a previous award value.

16. The method of claim 15 wherein the step of selecting award values comprises selecting n award increments and determining, under processor control, n intermediate award values by adding, one at a time, respective ones of the selected n award increments to previous award values.
17. The method of claim 16 wherein a first one of the n award increments is added to the opening award value to define a first one of the n intermediate award values.
18. The method of claim 17 wherein consecutive ones of the n award increments are added, one at a time, to most recent ones of the n intermediate award values to define next consecutive ones of the n intermediate award values.
19. The method of claim 11 wherein the step of presenting the sequence of award values comprises displaying selected ones of the award values.
20. The method of claim 11 wherein the step of presenting the sequence of award values comprises announcing selected ones of the award values.
21. A gaming machine comprising:
 - a processor operable to execute a bonus game program defining an award presentation;
 - a selection element for selecting, under processor control, a sequence of award values for said award presentation, the sequence of award values including an opening award value, a number of intermediate award values and a final award value;
 - a presentation element for presenting the sequence of award values to a player; and
 - a payout mechanism for awarding a payoff to the player based on the final award value.
22. A method of operating a gaming machine under control of a processor, the method comprising the steps of:
 - executing, under processor control, a bonus game program defining an award presentation in which bids are made upon a selected object;
 - selecting, under processor control, a sequence of the bids which are to be made in the award presentation, the sequence of bids including an opening bid, a number of intermediate bids and a final bid defining a winning bid;
 - presenting the bids in the award presentation; and
 - awarding a payoff to the player based on the winning bid.
23. The method of claim 22 wherein the game program defines a plurality of selectable objects, and further including the step of selecting one of the objects thereby defining the selected object.
24. The method of claim 23 wherein the step of selecting one of the objects is accomplished under player control.
25. The method of claim 22 wherein the game program defines a plurality of game characters and the step of presenting bids comprises respective ones of the game characters presenting the bids.
26. The method of claim 25 wherein the step of presenting bids comprises respective ones of the game characters announcing the bids.
27. The method of claim 25 wherein the step of presenting bids includes the step of selecting designated ones of the game characters for presenting the bids.
28. The method of claim 27 wherein the step of selecting game characters comprises selecting at least one of the game characters under player control.
29. The method of claim 27 wherein the step of selecting game characters comprises selecting a preferred character under player control.
30. The method of claim 29 wherein the step of presenting bids comprises the preferred character announcing the

opening bid.

31. The method of claim 27 wherein the step of selecting game characters comprises selecting a plurality of the game characters under processor control.
32. The method of claim 31 wherein the step of selecting game characters comprises selecting respective game characters for presenting the bids generally according to a selection probability defined by the game program.
33. The method of claim 32 wherein the game program defines a selection probability for the various characters which varies according to the selected object.
34. The method of claim 27 wherein the step of selecting game characters comprises selecting a preferred character under player control and a plurality of other game characters under processor control.
35. The method of claim 34 wherein the game program defines a default selection probability for each of the various characters, and further including the step of increasing the selection probability of the preferred character so that it is higher than the default selection probability.
36. A gaming machine comprising:
 - a processor operable to execute a bonus game program defining an award presentation in which bids are made upon a selected object;
 - a selection element for selecting, under processor control, a sequence of the bids which are to be made in the award presentation, the sequence of bids including an opening bid, a number of intermediate bids and a final bid defining a winning bid;
 - a presentation element for presenting the sequence of bids; and
 - a payout mechanism for awarding a payoff to the player based on the winning bid.
37. The method of claim 36 wherein the game program defines a plurality of game characters and the presentation element includes a character selection element operable to select designated ones of the game characters for presenting the bids.
38. The method of claim 37 wherein the character selection element is operable to select designated ones of the game characters for presenting the bids generally according to a selection probability defined by the game program.
39. A gaming machine, comprising:
 - a presentation element; and
 - a processor causing said presentation element to successively present a non-linear increasing sequence of potential payouts to a player, said sequence of potential payouts being presented by said presentation element at irregular time intervals, at least a final one of said potential payouts being awarded to said player.
40. The gaming machine of claim 39, further including a base game and a bonus game, said bonus game being triggered in response to a predetermined event occurring in said base game, said bonus game including said presentation element.
41. The gaming machine of claim 40, wherein said presentation element includes a bonus display and wherein said potential payouts are payouts in said bonus game, said sequence of potential payouts being shown on said bonus display.
42. The gaming machine of claim 40, wherein said base game includes a spinning reel display showing a plurality of symbols on each of a plurality of rotatable reels, said predetermined event corresponding to a predetermined combination of said symbols.
43. The gaming machine of claim 39, wherein said sequence of potential payouts are bids made upon a selected object presented by said presentation element.
44. A method of operating a gaming machine under control of a processor, comprising:

providing a presentation element;
 successively presenting, on said presentation element, a non-linear increasing sequence of potential payouts
 to a player, said sequence of potential payouts being presented by said presentation element at irregular time
 intervals; and

5 awarding at least a final one of said potential payouts to said player.

45. The method of claim 44, wherein said gaming machine includes a base game and a bonus game, and further
 including the step of triggering said bonus game in response to a predetermined event occurring in said base
 game, said steps of successively presenting a sequence of potential payouts and awarding a final one of said
 10 potential payouts being performed in said bonus game.

46. The method of claim 45, wherein said presentation element includes a bonus display, wherein said potential pay-
 outs are payouts in said bonus game, and wherein said step of successively presenting a sequence of potential
 payouts includes showing said sequence of potential payouts on said bonus display.

15 47. The method of claim 45, wherein said base game includes a spinning reel display showing a plurality of symbols
 on each of a plurality of rotatable reels, said predetermined event corresponding to a predetermined combination
 of said symbols.

20 48. The method of claim 44, wherein said sequence of potential payouts are bids made upon a selected object pre-
 sented by said presentation element.

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Fig. 1

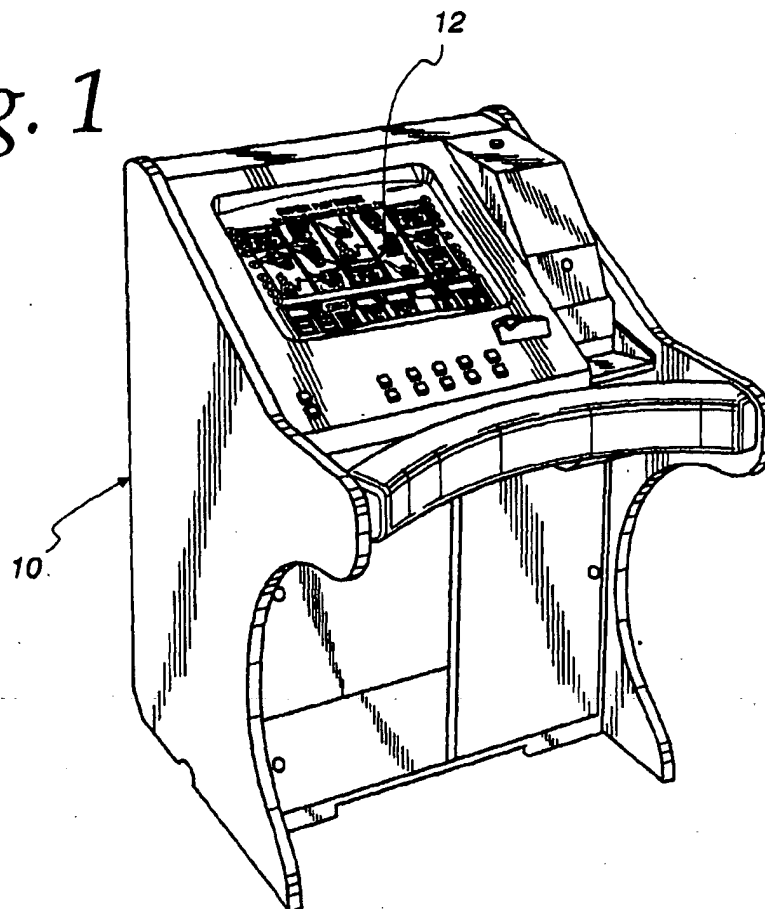


Fig. 2

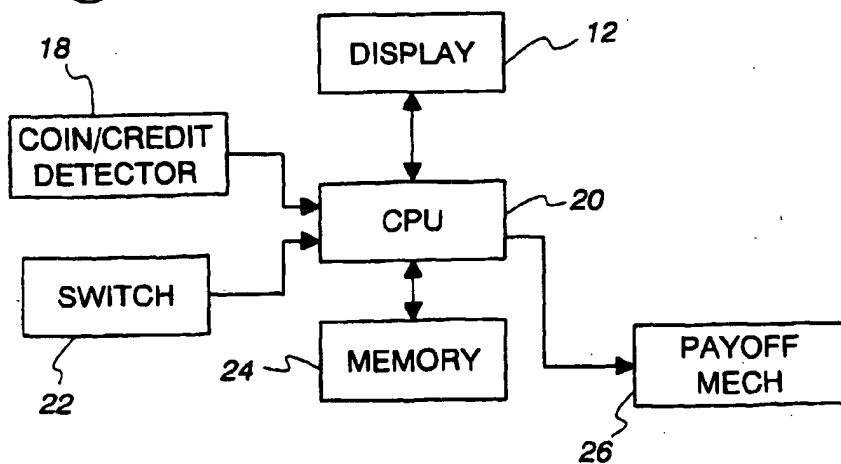


Fig. 3

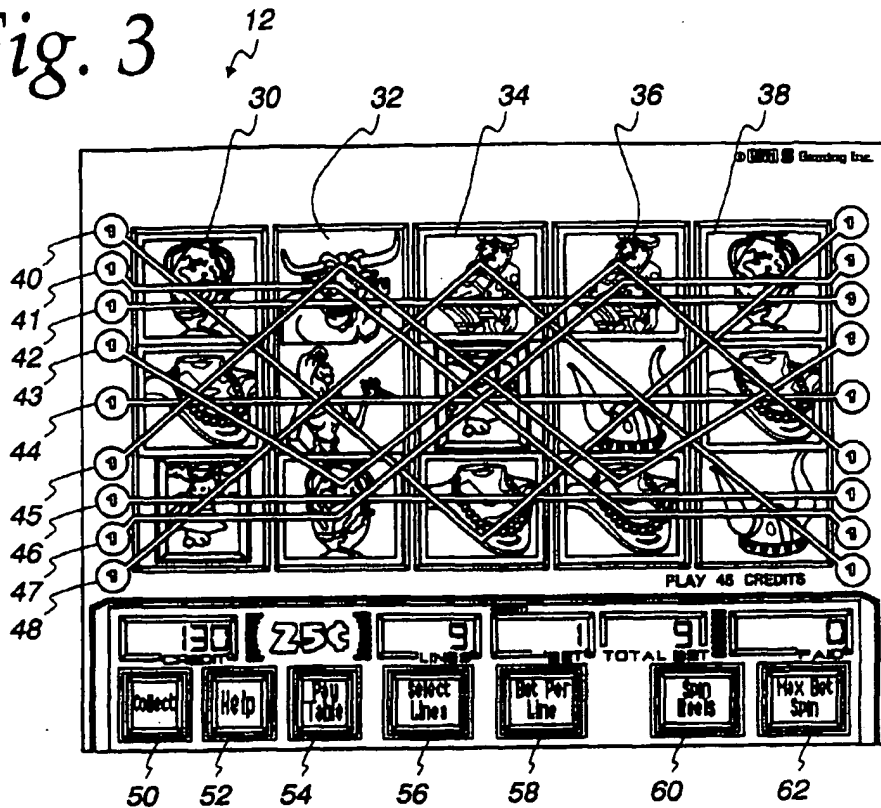


Fig. 4

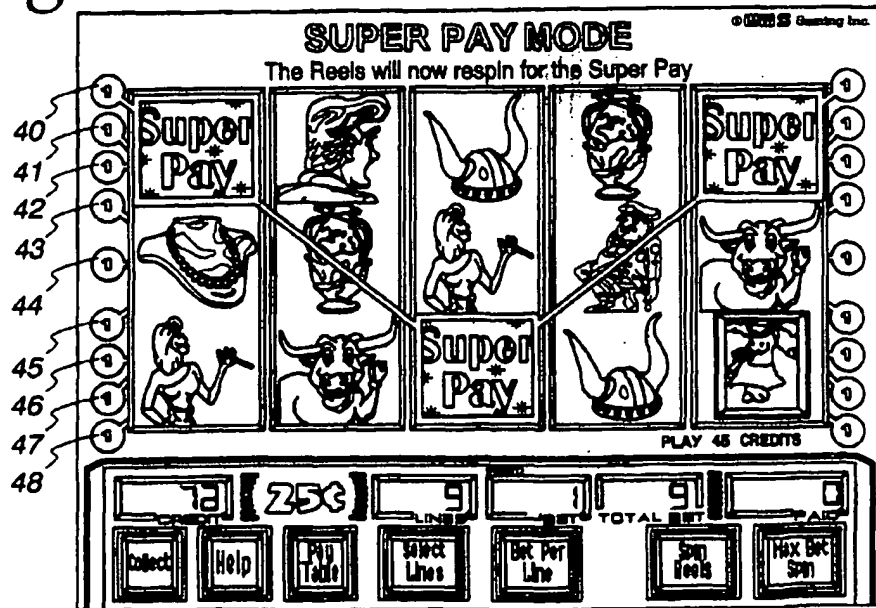


Fig. 5

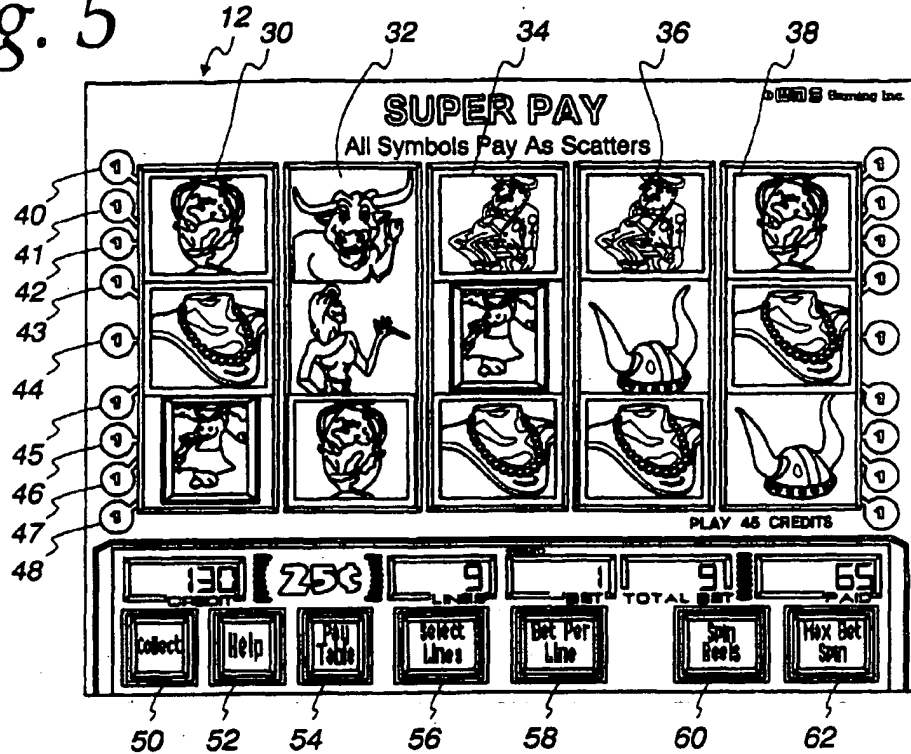
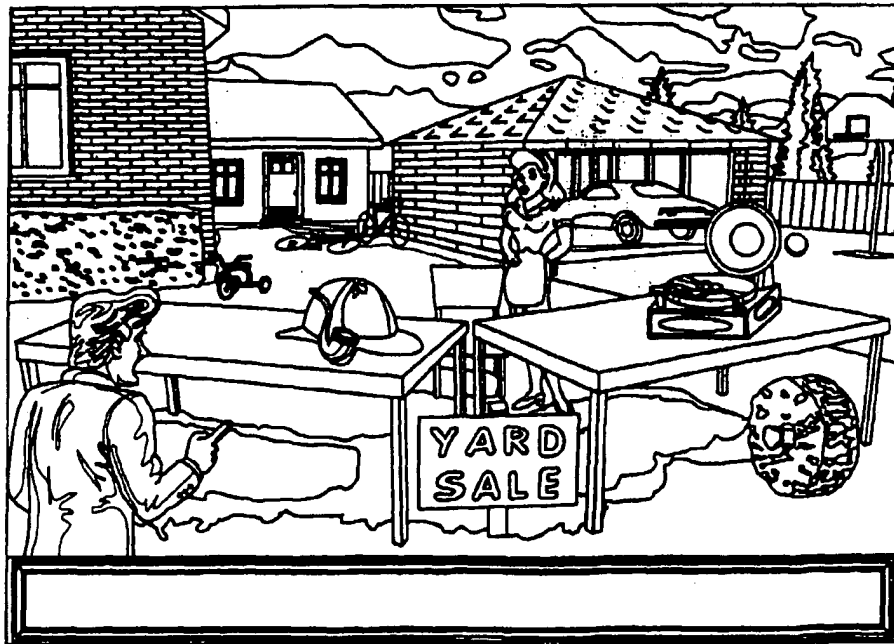


Fig. 6



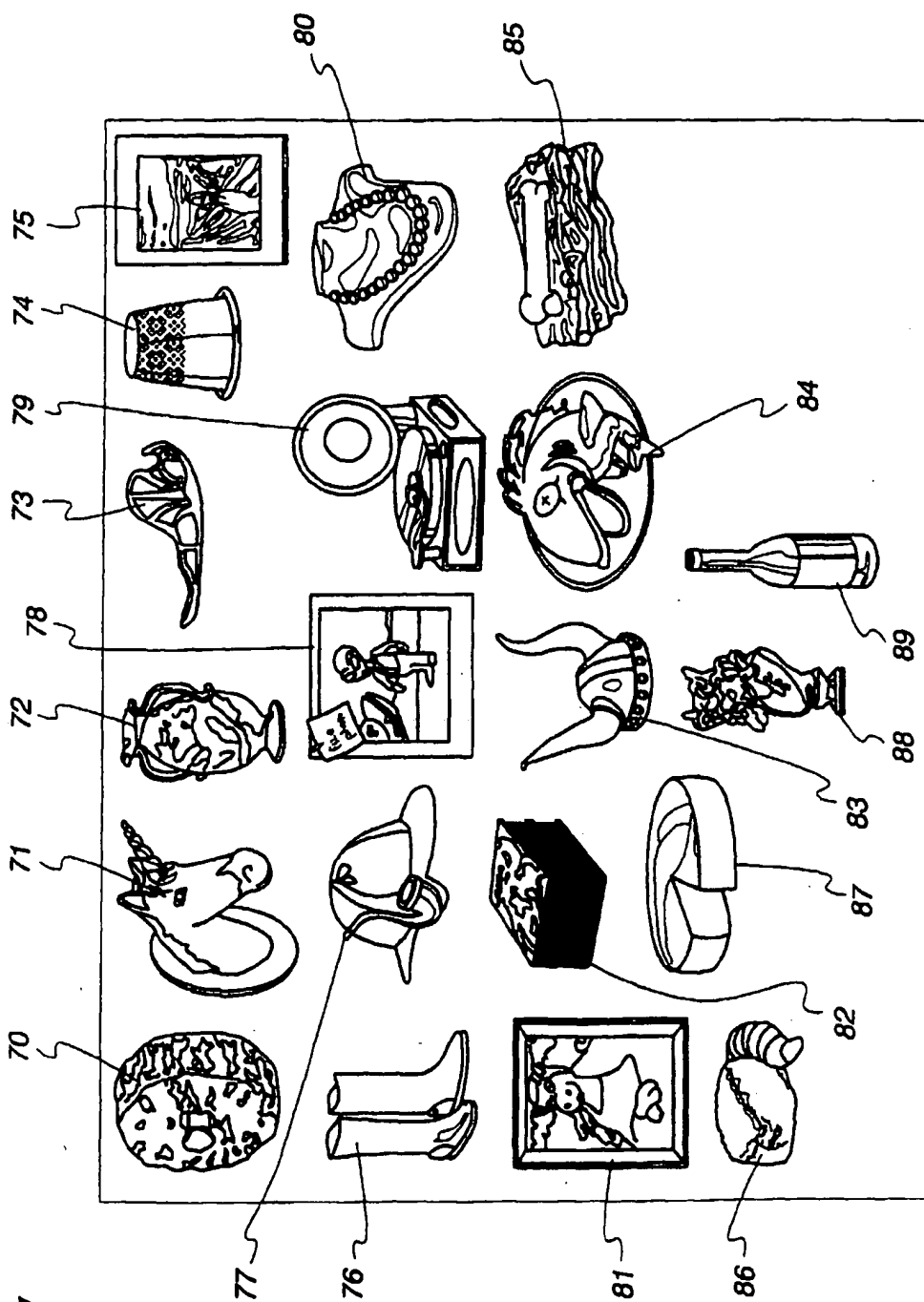


Fig. 7

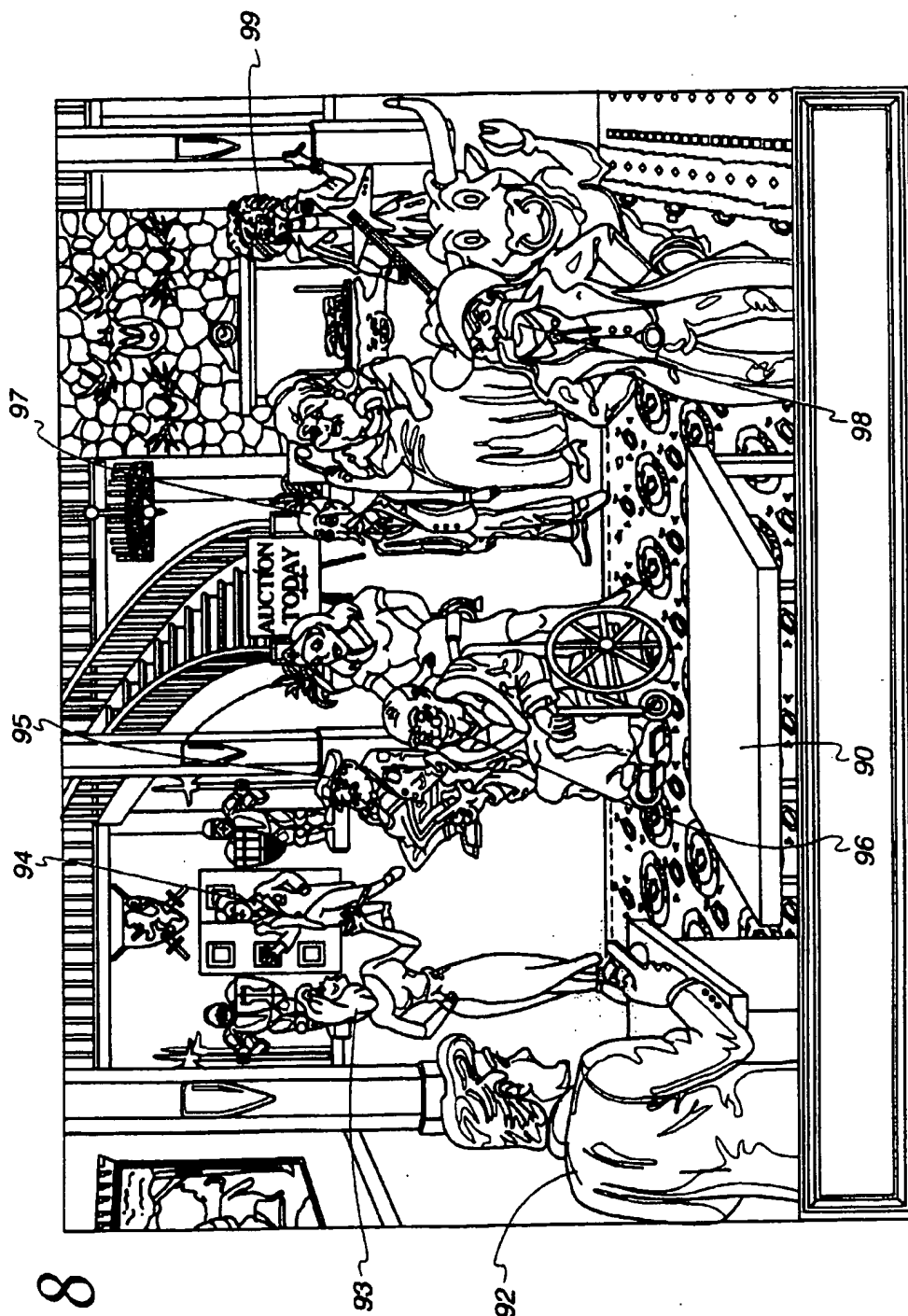


Fig. 8